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ABSTRACT

The National Parent Teacher Association (PTA) has developed standards for parent and family involvement in education in conjunction with the National Coalition for Parent Involvement in Education and in keeping with the National Education Goals of 1990. These standards are research-based and grounded in sound educational philosophy and practical experience. The standards, each of which is discussed in detail, are: (1) Communicating--Communication between home and school is regular, two- way, and meaningful; (2) Parenting--Parenting skills are promoted and supported; (3) Student Learning--Parents play an integral role in assisting student learning; (4) Volunteering--Parents are welcome in the school and their support and assistance are sought; (5) School Decision Making and Advocacy--Parents are full partners in decisions that affect children and their families; and (6) Collaborating with Community--Community resources are used to strengthen schools, families, and student learning. The research that led to the development of these standards is summarized. Research studies indicate that although the six program standards are closely related, each produces distinct and often unique gains for students, parents, and schools. Sample applications for putting each idea into practice accompany each program standard. Six appendixes include a checklist for quality indicators, an action plan worksheet, advice for developing a family involvement policy, a model policy, a bibliography, and acknowledgments. (Contains 19 references.) (SLD)

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# National Standards

## — for —

# Parent/Family Involvement Programs

**National PTA®**

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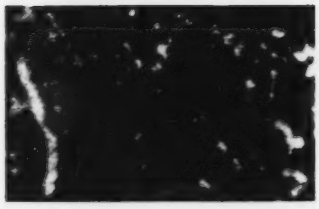

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# Foreword

Affirming the significance of parent and family involvement has been a priority of the National PTA since its founding. Over the past 100 years, National PTA has consistently demonstrated that effectively involving parents and families in support of children and their education produces meaningful and lasting results.

In the midst of the current climate of education reform, National PTA maintains what numerous research studies and years of experience as advocates on behalf of children have demonstrated to be true: ***Parent and family involvement increases student achievement and success.***

The overall importance of parent and family involvement, as the foundation for all other education reforms, warrants the same consideration and attention as other areas for which national standards are being developed. Therefore, the establishment of standards to guide parent involvement programs and evaluate their quality and effectiveness is crucial.

The National Standards for Parent/Family Involvement Programs were developed by the National PTA in cooperation with education and parent involvement professionals through the National Coalition for Parent Involvement in Education. The program standards of excellence and their quality indicators were created to be used in conjunction with other national standards and reform initiatives in support of children's learning and success.

In recent years, through unwavering advocacy efforts, National PTA secured parent involvement as one of the eight National Education Goals:

> Every school will promote partnerships that will increase parental involvement and participation in promoting the social, emotional and academic growth of children.

It is with this fundamental goal in mind that the National PTA invites all education and parent involvement representatives to support these National Standards for Parent/Family Involvement Programs, so that student success can soar—in school and beyond.

**Joan Dykstra, President**
**National PTA**

# Why National Standards?

## National Standards for Parent/Family Involvement Programs

**Standard I:** Communicating—Communication between home and school is regular, two-way, and meaningful.

**Standard II:** Parenting—Parenting skills are promoted and supported.

**Standard III:** Student Learning—Parents play an integral role in assisting student learning.

**Standard IV:** Volunteering—Parents are welcome in the school, and their support and assistance are sought.

**Standard V:** School Decision Making and Advocacy—Parents are full partners in the decisions that affect children and families.

**Standard VI:** Collaborating with Community—Community resources are used to strengthen schools, families, and student learning.

## Introduction

Over 30 years' research has proven beyond dispute the positive connection between parent* involvement and student success. Effectively engaging parents and families in the education of their children has the potential to be far more transformational than any other type of education reform.

The National Standards for Parent/Family Involvement Programs and their quality indicators are research based and grounded in both sound philosophy and practical experience. The purpose for the standards is threefold:

- To promote meaningful parent and family participation
- To raise awareness regarding the components of effective programs
- To provide guidelines for schools** that wish to improve their programs

* Throughout this document are references to "parent" involvement. All such references may be interpreted broadly to include the adults who play an important role in a child's family life, since other adults—grandparents, aunts, uncles, step-parents, guardians—may carry the primary responsibility for a child's education, development, and well-being.

** Throughout this document are references to "schools." All such references may be interpreted broadly to include other programs that serve children and families, i.e., other academic, specialty, or community programs.



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The program standards are *guidelines* for leaders of institutions with programs serving parents and families. Therefore, the intended audience includes principals, administrators, educators, and parents who are in positions to influence and improve parent involvement programs. When the standards are used as guidelines, they can direct leaders as they move from discussion to action in developing dynamic programs to improve student achievement through parent involvement. As with any effective long-term reform, the overall integration and implementation of standards should be based on local needs and circumstances.

The National PTA will regularly review and revise the standards to ensure that they are dynamic and responsive to future demographic trends and research. Future versions will be shaped through collaboration with other groups working on standards for teacher preparation, core academic content, and other related school reform initiatives.

## Special features of this guide

The research that led to the development of the National Standards for Parent/Family Involvement Programs is summarized in the following section. The **research summary** provides insights to how parent and family involvement is directly linked to student success, quality schools, and effective reform strategies.

Research studies indicate that although the six program standards are closely related, each produces distinct, and in many cases, unique gains for students, parents, or schools. **Quality indicators**, listed with each program standard, identify the important elements of each standard if those distinctions and unique gains are to be realized. They inform local leaders about what contributes to effective programs and fosters success.

Gains for students are greatest when parents participate in activities in each of the six standard areas; therefore, **sample applications** for putting ideas into action accompany each program standard. Also included, in Appendix A, are **checklists** for the quality indicators of each program standard to help assess how effectively each standard is represented in parent involvement programs.

# Research Findings

When it comes to parent involvement and its powerful influence, the knowledge base is broad and clear. The challenge comes in transforming knowledge into practice, and practice into results.

The most comprehensive survey of the research is a series of publications developed by Anne Henderson and Nancy Berla: *The Evidence Grows* (1981); *The Evidence Continues to Grow* (1987); and *A New Generation of Evidence: The Family Is Critical to Student Achievement* (1995). Citing more than 85 studies, these publications document the profound and comprehensive benefits for students, families, and schools, when parents and family members become participants in their children's education and their lives.

The findings listed below are from the pertinent research.

## Parent and Family Involvement and Student Success

- When parents are involved, students achieve more, regardless of socio-economic status, ethnic/racial background, or the parents' education level.
- The more extensive the parent involvement, the higher the student achievement.
- When parents are involved in their students' education, those students have higher grades and test scores, better attendance, and complete homework more consistently.
- When parents are involved, students exhibit more positive attitudes and behavior.
- Students whose parents are involved in their lives have higher graduation rates and greater enrollment rates in post-secondary education.
- Different types of parent/family involvement produce different gains. To have long-lasting gains for students, parent involvement activities must be well-planned, inclusive, and comprehensive.
- Educators hold higher expectations of students whose parents collaborate with the teacher. They also hold higher opinions of those parents.
- In programs that are designed to involve parents in full partnerships, student achievement for disadvantaged children not only improves, it can reach levels that are standard for middle-class children. In addition, the children who are farthest behind make the greatest gains.

- Children from diverse cultural backgrounds tend to do better when parents and professionals collaborate to bridge the gap between the culture at home and the learning institution.
- Student behaviors, such as alcohol use, violence, and anti-social behavior decrease as parent involvement increases.
- Students are more likely to fall behind in academic performance if their parents do not participate in school events, develop a working relationship with their child's educators, or keep up with what is happening in their child's school.
- The benefits of involving parents are not confined to the early years; there are significant gains at all ages and grade levels.
- Junior and senior high school students whose parents remain involved, make better transitions, maintain the quality of their work, and develop realistic plans for their future. Students whose parents are not involved, on the other hand, are more likely to drop out of school.
- The most accurate predictor of a student's achievement in school is not income or social status, but the extent to which that student's family is able to (1) create a home environment that encourages learning; (2) communicate high, yet reasonable, expectations for their children's achievement and future careers; and (3) become involved in their children's education at school and in the community.

*The evidence is now beyond dispute. When parents are involved in their children's education at home their children do better in school.*

*Henderson and Berla*

## Parent and Family Involvement and **School Quality**

- Schools that work well with families have improved teacher morale and higher ratings of teachers by parents.
- Schools where parents are involved have more support from families and better reputations in the community.
- School programs that involve parents outperform identical programs without parent and family involvement.
- Schools where children are failing improve dramatically when parents are enabled to become effective partners in their child's education.
- The school's practices to inform and involve parents are stronger determinants of whether inner-city parents will be involved with their children's education than are parent education, family size, marital status, and even student grade level.

## Parent and Family Involvement and **Program Design**

- The more the relationship between parents and educators approaches a comprehensive, well-planned partnership, the higher the student achievement.
- For low-income families, programs offering home visits are more successful in involving parents than programs requiring parents to visit the school. However, when parents become involved *at* school, their children make even greater gains.
- When parents receive frequent and effective communication from the school or program, their involvement increases, their overall evaluation of educators improves, and their attitudes toward the program are more positive.
- Parents are much more likely to become involved when educators encourage and assist parents in helping their children with their schoolwork.
- Effective programs are lead by a team of administrators, educators, and parents, and have access to financial resources.
- When they are treated as partners and given relevant information by people with whom they are comfortable, parents put into practice the involvement strategies they already know are effective, but have been hesitant to contribute.
- One of the most significant challenges to conducting an effective program is the lack of instruction on parent and family involvement that educators and administrators receive in their professional training.
- Collaboration with families is an essential component of a reform strategy, but it is not a substitute for high-quality education programs or comprehensive school improvement.

# Standard I

# Communicating

## Communication between home and school is regular, two-way, and meaningful.

Communication is the foundation of a solid partnership. When parents and educators communicate effectively, positive relationships develop, problems are more easily solved, and students make greater progress.

Too often school or program communication is *one-way* without the chance to exchange ideas and share perceptions. Effective home-school communication is the *two-way* sharing of information vital to student success. Even parent-teacher conferences can be one-way if the goal is merely reporting student progress. Partnering requires give-and-take conversation, goal setting for the future, and regular follow-up interactions.

## Quality Indicators

### Successful programs:

1. Use a variety of communication tools on a regular basis, seeking to facilitate two-way interaction through each type of medium.
2. Establish opportunities for parents and educators to share *partnering* information such as student strengths and learning preferences.
3. Provide clear information regarding course expectations and offerings, student placement, school activities, student services, and optional programs.
4. Mail report cards and regular progress reports to parents. Provide support services and follow-up conferences as needed.
5. Disseminate information on school reforms, policies, discipline procedures, assessment tools, and school goals, and include parents in any related decision-making process.
6. Conduct conferences with parents at least twice a year, with follow-up as needed. These should accommodate the varied schedules of parents, language barriers, and the need for child care.
7. Encourage immediate contact between parents and teachers when concerns arise.
8. Distribute student work for parental comment and review on a regular basis.
9. Translate communications to assist non–English-speaking parents.
10. Communicate with parents regarding positive student behavior and achievement, not just regarding misbehavior or failure.
11. Provide opportunities for parents to communicate with principals and other administrative staff.
12. Promote informal activities at which parents, staff, and community members can interact.
13. Provide staff development regarding effective communication techniques and the importance of regular two-way communication between the school and the family.

## Sample Applications

Use a Variety of Communication Tools

- Explore program and community support options for improving mail, telephone, fax, or e-mail access and use for educators and parents. For example, automated phone systems are a powerful tool for getting information to parents—from daily assignments and attendance reports, to parenting tips and student achievement information.
- Create class or program newsletters for parents that contain tips for helping children learn in the home, fun activities to do as a family, and other useful ideas.
- Establish a routine method for parents to review their children's work on a regular basis. For example, use manila envelopes or folders to send student work home each week with a place for parent comments on the front cover.
- Implement additional feedback opportunities for parents and family members such as surveys on current program issues or special parent guest columns in the school newsletter.
- Sponsor program or community events that allow educators and parents to interact on a social basis in addition to standard parent-teacher conferences or school/program meetings.
- Develop a parent handbook to provide positive, practical information about your school or program. Include information on how parents can support their child's efforts to succeed.

### *Program Orientation*

At the beginning of the school or program year, offer orientation sessions that include the following:

- Course or program expectations and goals
- Developmental and skills information
- Information on how/when to contact program staff or administration
- Process for handling program questions/concerns
- Strategies to support learning at home
- Testing/assessment information and procedures

Always include a time for questions and answers to address specific parent or family concerns. If possible, provide a video recording of the event to share with those unable to attend.

### *Building Partnerships*

With so many students, how can educators build effective partnerships with each of their parents? One teacher sets aside 10 minutes a day to telephone, e-mail, or send postcards to parents. Once a month the teacher is able to make at least two contacts with each family represented in the class. Most conversations focus on student successes and upcoming activities for parents and families. Because of the consistent contact and accessibility, parents are more eager to respond and support student/class goals.

## Standard II

# Parenting

### Parenting skills are promoted and supported.

Parents are a child's life support system. Consequently, the most important support a child can receive comes from the home.

School personnel and program staff support positive parenting by respecting and affirming the strengths and skills needed by parents to fulfill their role. From making sure that students arrive at school rested, fed, and ready to learn, to setting high learning expectations and nurturing self-esteem, parents sustain their children's learning.

When staff members recognize parent roles and responsibilities, ask parents what supports they need, and work to find ways to meet those needs, they communicate a clear message to parents: "We value you and need your input" in order to maintain a high-quality program.

## Quality Indicators

### Successful programs:

1. Communicate the importance of positive relationships between parents and their children.
2. Link parents to programs and resources within the community that provide support services to families.
3. Reach out to all families, not just those who attend parent meetings.
4. Establish policies that support and respect family responsibilities, recognizing the variety of parenting traditions and practices within the community's cultural and religious diversity.
5. Provide an accessible parent/family information and resource center to support parents and families with training, resources, and other services.
6. Encourage staff members to demonstrate respect for families and the family's primary role in the rearing of children to become responsible adults.

## Sample Applications

Reach Out to All Families

- Find out which ethnic groups are represented in each school or program. Provide translation and other support services when needed. Be sensitive to cultural differences, and find appropriate ways to communicate acceptance and respect.
- Affirm parent responsibilities by consulting parents prior to providing special services for children, such as counseling or other social services.
- At least once a year, schedule a school or program event with workshops given by professional personnel or local parent educators to help parents deal with parenting issues. Provide child care and transportation to encourage parents and family members to participate.
- Develop "family kits" built around relevant themes with games, videos, conversation starters, or other tools for parents to interact with their children on a specific topic. For example, a kit could be built around the theme of setting family goals or developing house rules.

### *Respecting Diverse Family Cultures and Traditions*

Quality schools and programs must be culturally sensitive to increasingly diverse student and family populations. Appreciating the traditions of families from various cultures requires, first of all, an awareness and acceptance of their differences.

Find ways to help parents and families value and share their distinctiveness. Cultural fairs or other opportunities to celebrate specific ethnic holidays or traditions may help parents and family members develop a sense of belonging and ownership in the school and community. Making resources available in the parents' first language remains critical in responding to the needs and concerns of the parents and families served.

### *Parent and Family Resource Centers*

Designate an area in your school or community for parents and family members to call their own. The "center" should be tailored to respond to the issues and concerns of your school or program members.

The center's function could vary from providing an informal gathering place for parents to share information, to providing comprehensive access to community services. A wide array of family resource and support materials including videos, brochures, and other publications are often included. Some centers have expanded to provide parenting workshops, toy-lending libraries, or English as a Second Language (ESL) classes. Highlighting "what's new at the family center" in each school newsletter and sponsoring special family or education events at the center throughout the year helps to increase the center's visibility and effectiveness.

# Standard III

# Student Learning

## Parents play an integral role in assisting student learning.

Student learning increases when parents are invited into the process by helping at home. Enlisting parents' involvement provides educators and administrators with a valuable support system—creating a team that is working for each child's success.

The vast majority of parents are willing to assist their students in learning, but many times are not sure what assistance is most helpful and appropriate. Helping parents connect to their children's learning enables parents to communicate in powerful ways that they value what their children achieve. Whether it's working together on a computer, displaying student work at home, or responding to a particular class assignment, parents' actions communicate to their children that education is important.

## Quality Indicators

### Successful programs:

1. Seek and encourage parental participation in decision-making that affects students.
2. Inform parents of the expectations for students in each subject at each grade level.
3. Provide information regarding how parents can foster learning at home, give appropriate assistance, monitor homework, and give feedback to teachers.
4. Regularly assign interactive homework that will require students to discuss and interact with their parents about what they are learning in class.
5. Sponsor workshops or distribute information to assist parents in understanding how students can improve skills, get help when needed, meet class expectations, and perform well on assessments.
6. Involve parents in setting student goals each year and in planning for post-secondary education and careers. Encourage the development of a personalized education plan for each student, where parents are full partners.
7. Provide opportunities for staff members to learn and share successful approaches to engaging parents in their child's education.

## Sample Applications

Foster Learning at Home

- Report research findings on how parent involvement can promote student success in school newsletters.
- Provide information sheets to guide parents in helping students with a particular skill—for example, information that explains how to help a young child with reading or how to help a teen with a research project.
- Some projects readily lend themselves to involving parents or other family members. Examples include personal interviews on specific topics or reports based on visits to community museums or points of interest. Provide advance instructions and specific guidelines for each project.
- Ask parents to take an active role in reviewing student portfolios. Parents have the opportunity to review project expectations, discover their child's areas of strength, and gain insight in how to help their child improve.

### *How Much Help Is Too Much?*

Offer suggestions to parents on how they can help their children learn, including questions to ask and practical ways to practice skills. One English teacher describes how parents can ask questions and make suggestions to help students learn and practice writing skills. Studies have found that writing improves when students seek advice from others and write for an audience. Parents and family members can provide that needed feedback and support.

### *Sample Home-to-School Communication*

Design homework assignments to include parent sign-off. Provide instructions about what to look for in each assignment, and offer a quick check-off response such as:

☐ My child understands and correctly applies this skill.

☐ My child needed help on this, but overall seems to understand this lesson.

☐ My child needs further instruction on this skill/lesson.

Other comments _____

_____

Parent signature

_____

### *Student-Parent Workshops*

Provide brief workshops on specific topics of interest to students and parents. Topics might include a series on study skills, new information on a particular curriculum area such as math or science, or college and career planning. When applicable, include hands-on learning activities and detailed information to help both parents and students practice new skills.

## Standard IV

# Volunteering

### Parents are welcome in the school, and their support and assistance are sought.

When parents volunteer, both families and schools reap benefits that come in few other ways. Literally millions of dollars of volunteer services are performed by parents and family members each year in the public schools. Studies have concluded that volunteers express greater confidence in the schools where they have opportunities to participate regularly. In addition, assisting in school or program events/activities communicates to a child, "I care about what you do here."

In order for parents to feel appreciated and welcome, volunteer work must be meaningful and valuable to them. Capitalizing on the expertise and skills of parents and family members provides much needed support to educators and administrators already taxed in their attempts to meet academic goals and student needs.

Although there are many parents for whom volunteering during school hours is not possible, creative solutions like before- or after-school "drop-in" programs or "at home" support activities provide opportunities for parents to offer their assistance as well.

## Quality Indicators
### Successful programs:

1. Ensure that office staff greetings, signage near the entrances, and any other interaction with parents create a climate in which parents feel valued and welcome.
2. Survey parents regarding their interests, talents, and availability, then coordinate the parent resources with those that exist within the school and among the faculty.
3. Ensure that parents who are unable to volunteer in the school building are given the options for helping in other ways, at home or place of employment.
4. Organize an easy, accessible program for utilizing parent volunteers, providing ample training on volunteer procedures and school protocol.
5. Develop a system for contacting all parents to assist as the year progresses.
6. Design opportunities for those with limited time and resources to participate by addressing child care, transportation, work schedule needs, and so forth.
7. Show appreciation for parents' participation, and value their diverse contributions.
8. Educate and assist staff members in creating an inviting climate and effectively utilizing volunteer resources.
9. Ensure that volunteer activities are meaningful and built on volunteer interests and abilities.

## Sample Applications

Organize for Effective Use of Volunteers

- Develop a survey to gather parent and family volunteer information including special skills or talents. Provide opportunities for those who are able to volunteer during the day, those who are able to commit to regular service, and those who can participate occasionally at home or at work. Be sure to follow up with volunteers on a timely basis.

- Provide a consistent place and process for parent volunteers to sign in and list the hours served. In addition, provide surveys regarding school or program climate. Encourage volunteers to offer their suggestions by using "anonymous" response forms.

- Invite parents to join their child for lunch whenever convenient. If possible, provide a free lunch during the year.

### *Volunteer Orientation*

Take time to train volunteers regarding school or program protocols, routines and procedures, volunteer expectations, and equipment usage. In addition, provide a central location for volunteers to work with secure places for personal belongings.

Give clear instructions for completing volunteer tasks as well as the appropriate staff or teacher contact name if more information is needed. Look for creative ways to show appreciation for volunteer support on an ongoing basis.

### *Volunteer Information Packet*

As part of the volunteer orientation, provide a packet containing the following important information:

Accident procedures
Building map
Emergency exit plans
Equipment operating instructions
Parking information
School or program handbook
Sign-in/out policies
Suggestion forms
Volunteer welcome letter and list of benefits
Volunteer work locations
Where to go for help and supplies

## Standard V

# School Decision Making and Advocacy

### Parents are full partners in the decisions that affect children and families.

Studies have shown that schools where parents are involved in decision making and advocacy have higher levels of student achievement and greater public support.

Effective partnerships develop when each partner is respected and empowered to fully participate in the decision-making process. Schools and programs that actively enlist parent participation and input communicate that parents are valued as full partners in the educating of their children.

Parents and educators depend on shared authority in decision-making systems to foster parental trust, public confidence, and mutual support of each other's efforts in helping students succeed. The involvement of parents, as individuals or as representative of others, is crucial in collaborative decision-making processes on issues from curriculum and course selection, to discipline policies and over-all school reform measures.

## Quality Indicators

### Successful programs:

1. Provide understandable, accessible, and well-publicized processes for influencing decisions, raising issues or concerns, appealing decisions, and resolving problems.
2. Encourage the formation of PTAs or other parent groups to identify and respond to issues of interest to parents.
3. Include parents on all decision-making and advisory committees, and ensure adequate training for such areas as policy, curriculum, budget, school reform initiatives, safety, and personnel. Where site governance bodies exist, give equal representation to parents.
4. Provide parents with current information regarding school policies, practices, and both student and school performance data.
5. Enable parents to participate as partners when setting school goals, developing or evaluating programs and policies, or responding to performance data.
6. Encourage and facilitate active parent participation in the decisions that affect students, such as student placement, course selection, and individual personalized education plans.
7. Treat parental concerns with respect and demonstrate genuine interest in developing solutions.
8. Promote parent participation on school district, state, and national committees and issues.
9. Provide training for staff and parents on collaborative partnering and shared decision making.

## Sample Applications

Enable Parents to Participate as Partners

- Share annual reports of school performance and program information with parents at an open meeting to review current progress and solicit input for future goals. Respect for parent perspectives fosters increased understanding of school challenges, more effective program goals for improvement, and overall increased parent and community support.
- Communicate school/program procedures for addressing parent concerns including appropriate contact person and the process for defining the problem and developing and implementing solutions. Publicize successful changes in the school or program as a result of parent initiation and involvement.
- Include a *mini-poll* (one question) of parent opinions in each program newsletter covering a wide range of topics over time. Utilize parent feedback in making school/program decisions.
- Develop workshops or include parents in ongoing training on relevant topics such as developing parents as advocates, mastering skills for supporting learning, identifying and supporting learning styles, resolving difficulties, and fostering student achievement.

### *Parent Involvement in Making Program Decisions*

By recruiting parent representatives to serve on committees dealing with policies and program decisions, administrators acknowledge the importance of parents' knowledge of and experience with children.

To ensure ongoing effective parent participation in the decision-making process, policy makers can work to create an environment where parents can:

- Attend open meetings on school/program issues
- Receive clear program goals and objectives
- Ask questions without fear of intimidation
- Understand confusing terminology and jargon
- Monitor the steps taken to reach program goals
- Assist their children in understanding program expectations and changes

### *Problem Solving Know-How*

Promoting positive, constructive parent advocacy begins with frequently publicizing the process for dealing with concerns.

Parents need to understand the steps to problem solving and feel that the administration is genuinely interested in responding to their concerns in a constructive and fair manner.

The process should include identifying the problem, keeping the focus on the student's needs, avoiding blaming, meeting with the proper person(s) involved, gathering pertinent facts and information, brainstorming potential solutions, developing an action plan, and implementing and checking on progress. Repeat each step as necessary to resolve the problem.

## Standard VI

# Collaborating with Community

### Community resources are used to strengthen schools, families, and student learning.

As part of the larger community, schools and other programs fulfill important community goals. In like fashion, communities offer a wide array of resources valuable to schools and the families they serve.

When schools and communities work together, both are strengthened in synergistic ways and make gains that outpace what either entity could accomplish on its own:

- Families access community resources more easily;
- Businesses connect education programs with the realities of the workplace;
- Seniors contribute wisdom and gain a greater sense of purpose; and ultimately,
- Students serve and learn beyond their school involvement.

The best partnerships are mutually beneficial and structured to connect individuals, not just institutions or groups. This connection enables the power of community partnerships to be unleashed.

## Quality Indicators

### Successful programs:

1. Distribute information regarding cultural, recreational, academic, health, social, and other resources that serve families within the community.
2. Develop partnerships with local business and service groups to advance student learning and assist schools and families.
3. Encourage employers to adopt policies and practices that promote and support adult participation in children's education.
4. Foster student participation in community service.
5. Involve community members in school volunteer programs.
6. Disseminate information to the school community, including those without school-age children, regarding school programs and performance.
7. Collaborate with community agencies to provide family support services and adult learning opportunities, enabling parents to more fully participate in activities that support education.
8. Inform staff members of the resources available in the community and strategies for utilizing those resources.

## Sample Applications

Develop Partnerships with Local Business and Service Groups

- Work with community partners to hold special events such as health fairs, technology nights, or other learning opportunities to inform parents and families of community resources and services. Keep the events family-focused by providing activities suitable for both children and adults.
- Recruit school or program volunteers from senior citizen groups. Provide recruitment information that is highly specific about tasks to be performed, timeframe, and specific program requirements. Find creative ways to show appreciation to seniors for their assistance.
- In the local chamber of commerce newsletter, include a request from the school district superintendent for employer cooperation and encouragement of parent attendance at parent-teacher conferences and other parent involvement activities.
- Furnish local employers with information sheets containing parenting/parent involvement ideas.

### *Employer Support*

Innovative businesses have established policies that enable parents to support their children's learning more easily. Some are allowing parents to adjust work schedules to attend parent-teacher conferences or serve as volunteers. Other employers distribute school and program information or recognize employees who give personal time to support schools.

### *Potential Partners*

Within each community is a unique mix of organizations and service agencies that can offer valuable supports to parents and families. Consider the following partner categories:

Businesses
Chamber of commerce
Charitable organizations
Churches
Civic groups
Foundations
Local government
Local media
Military groups
Nonprofit associations
Senior citizens
Youth groups

### *Community Service Learning*

More and more schools are providing students with the opportunity to learn by serving in the community. From soup kitchens and clean-up projects, to volunteer activities in government and business, these hands-on student opportunities are especially powerful when linked to class discussions and curriculum objectives.

In some cases where student skills have been linked to employee needs, not only have employers expanded opportunities for student learning, but their companies have also benefited. Through these programs, employers are able to complete important projects, while students benefit from new learning experiences in actual work settings.

# Challenges and Opportunities

Engaging parents in highly effective ways requires confronting the challenges that have previously prevented that interaction. The challenges listed below are among those to be overcome, but each also offers numerous opportunities to truly transform parent and family involvement.

## Administrative Leadership

The principal or program director plays a pivotal role in making parent and family involvement a reality. Educators and other staff sense the level of priority administrators give to involving parents. The climate in a school is created, to a large extent, by the tone set in the office of administration. If principals collaborate with parents, educators will be more likely to follow suit.

Sometimes there is a misperception that partnering with parents, particularly in the decision-making process, will diminish the principal's authority. Yet, the top management models in America are open and collaborative, encouraging subordinates to share their concerns and engaging managers and workers in cooperative problem solving rather than making decisions through strict hierarchical systems. Such an approach need not diminish the manager's authority, but can lead to better decisions—in businesses or in schools.

Without administrative leadership, long-term progress in family-school partnerships is difficult to achieve since genuine change requires systemic solutions and coordinated efforts with consistent leadership support.

Working together to implement the program standards, principals and teachers can accomplish a great deal. When parent involvement becomes a mutual program goal, and parents, educators, and administrators work together as a team to develop a plan for reaching the standards, substantial progress results. The principal provides the leadership; the program standards provide the vision.

## Affirming Diversity

Programs serving parents and families must be aware and sensitive to the changes in our society represented by the word *diversity*. Successful programs increase awareness of all cultures represented. The importance of using translated materials and language interpreters, as needed, cannot be overstated.

We often hear the term "common courtesy," but courtesy in not common; it is culturally determined. The values, attitudes, manners, and views of all populations represented in the community should be respected and honored. The religious holidays and observances of all groups are to be given consideration in the context of the total program serving parents and families.

Not only are programs called upon to serve culturally diverse populations, but the structures and supports for families are continually changing as well. The predominant scenario in most households includes both parents working outside the home. In addition, single-parent families are on the rise as well as the number of grandparents who serve as primary caregivers for their grandchildren. These patterns of change in family structure indicate that the current needs of families are indeed diverse, requiring heightened sensitivity to the increasing demands of home life.

*Parent and family involvement is a wise investment for communities.*

As our society increases in the numbers and groups of diverse populations represented, only those programs willing to be flexible, sensitive, and supportive to the parents, children, and families they serve will be determined effective and worthwhile.

## Systemic Support

Research is clear that parent and family involvement is a wise investment for communities truly concerned about student achievement. If parent involvement traditions and habits are to be transformed, there must be adequate support from the education authorities outside the school.

Proactive parent involvement policies and practices at the district, state, and national levels are prerequisite. From school boards and district offices to state and national departments of education and national professional associations, principals and educators need to know their leaders are willing to support and encourage them as they seek to implement change.

Supporting parent and family involvement need not be expensive, but financial resources as well as moral support improve chances of success. Support may be in the form of a program coordinator, better access to telephones, or resource center materials to reach out to parents. When policy makers and education leaders make parent involvement a priority, their actions and the support systems they provide reflect their commitment.

## Teacher Preservice and Inservice Preparation

Even with the preponderance of research establishing the connection between effective parent involvement and student achievement, few teachers receive substantive preparation in how to partner with parents.

Recent surveys of current practice are revealing:

- Most parent involvement preparation occurs in early childhood or special education courses.
- No state requires a separate course in parent involvement for teacher licensure.
- Only a handful of states require parent involvement preparation as part of a course.

- A minority of the states include parent involvement in their competency standards for teachers/administrators or in their standards for teacher/administrator training programs.
- No state requires parent involvement coursework for recertification or renewal of a license.

*Effective parent and family involvement provides educators with a much needed support system.*

Still, there are promising signs. Both of the national associations that either accredit or set standards for teacher preparation programs, NCATE (National Council for Accreditation of Teacher Education) and NASDTEC (National Association of State Directors of Teacher Education and Certification), have recently added or strengthened indicators aimed at parent involvement. The National Board for Professional Teacher Standards has included parent involvement competencies in its standards. Several states are discussing ways to strengthen parent involvement requirements. While each of these efforts could be strengthened, they are a step forward and should begin to alter current practice.

In the meantime, providing teachers with parent and family involvement inservice and other professional development opportunities becomes critical. The National Standards for Parent/Family Involvement Programs provide a good basis for this preparation, indicating what practices lead to quality. Teachers should also be familiar with the research base and focus on communication and interpersonal skills, particularly those that help parents feel comfortable and respected.

The use of mentoring, peer coaching, mini-presentations with follow-up, and other collaborative methods for professional development suit this topic very well. Rather than waiting for educators to take special courses or providing a "one-shot" inservice presentation, schools and programs should look for ways to present knowledge of good practice with ample interaction among the faculty and staff and frequent opportunities for checking back and evaluating progress.

Aside from the benefits of increased student performance, effective parent and family involvement provides educators with a much needed support system. Research indicates that schools that work well with families have improved teacher/staff morale and have higher ratings of teachers by parents.

# Where to Begin

Belief in the importance of parent and family is the necessary starting point, but the following steps outline a process for initiating and maintaining momentum toward change:

### 1. Create an Action Team

Parents, educators, administrators, and others deemed appropriate must be represented and involved in reaching a common understanding and in setting mutual goals to which all are committed.

### 2. Examine Current Practice

Review the current status of parent and family involvement. Survey staff and parents to ensure a clear understanding of the current situation. The "Checklist for Quality Indicators" self-evaluations, beginning on the next page (Appendix A), are useful tools.

### 3. Develop a Plan of Improvement

Based on the evaluation of current practice, identify first steps and priority issues, including developing a parent/family involvement policy. Pay close attention to developing a comprehensive, well-balanced plan that includes activity in each of the six standard areas (Appendix B).

### 4. Develop a Written Parent/Family Involvement Policy

A written parent/family involvement policy establishes the vision, common mission, and foundation for future plans. See guidelines for developing a policy (Appendix C) and sample policy statement (Appendix D).

### 5. Secure Support

For optimal success, keep stakeholders—those responsible for implementation, those who will be affected, and those outside the school/program who have influence over the outcome—aware of the plan and willing to lend support to its success. Financial resources need to be determined and secured.

### 6. Provide Professional Development for School/Program Staff

Effective training is essential. The best models for training are those that provide staff with several opportunities to interact with the issues, work together, and monitor and evaluate progress.

### 7. Evaluate and Revise the Plan

Parent and family involvement is not a one-time goal. It merits a process of continuous improvement and a commitment to long-term success.

# Appendix A

## Standard I: Communicating

**Communication between home and school is regular, two-way, and meaningful.**

### Checklist for Quality Indicators

| | Consistently Evident | Frequently Evident | Seldom Evident | Not Evident |
|---|---|---|---|---|
| 1. Use a variety of communication tools on a regular basis, seeking to facilitate two-way interaction through each type of medium. | | | | |
| 2. Establish opportunities for parents and educators to share "partnering" information such as student strengths and learning preferences. | | | | |
| 3. Provide clear information regarding course expectations and offerings, student placement, school activities, student services, and optional programs. | | | | |
| 4. Mail report cards and regular progress reports to parents. Provide support services and follow-up conferences as needed. | | | | |
| 5. Disseminate information on school reforms, policies, discipline procedures, assessment tools, and school goals, and include parents in any related decision-making process. | | | | |
| 6. Conduct conferences with parents at least twice a year, with follow-up as needed. These should accommodate the varied schedules of parents, language barriers, and the need for child care. | | | | |
| 7. Encourage immediate contact between parents and teachers when concerns arise. | | | | |
| 8. Distribute student work for parental comment and review on a regular basis. | | | | |
| 9. Translate communications to assist non-English speaking parents. | | | | |
| 10. Communicate with parents regarding positive student behavior and achievement, not just regarding misbehavior or failure. | | | | |
| 11. Provide opportunities for parents to communicate with principals and other administrative staff. | | | | |
| 12. Promote informal activities at which parents, staff, and community members can interact. | | | | |
| 13. Provide staff development regarding effective communication techniques and the importance of regular two-way communication between the school and the family. | | | | |

# Standard II: Parenting

**Parenting skills are promoted and supported.**

## Checklist for Quality Indicators

| | Consistently Evident | Frequently Evident | Seldom Evident | Not Evident |
|---|---|---|---|---|
| 1. Communicate the importance of positive relationships between parents and their children. | | | | |
| 2. Link parents to programs and resources within the community that provide support services to families. | | | | |
| 3. Reach out to all families, not just those who attend parent meetings. | | | | |
| 4. Establish policies that support and respect family responsibilities, recognizing the variety of parenting traditions and practices within the community's cultural and religious diversity. | | | | |
| 5. Provide an accessible parent/family information and resource center to support parents and families with training, resources, and other services. | | | | |
| 6. Encourage staff members to demonstrate respect for families and the family's primary role in the rearing of children to become responsible adults. | | | | |

# Standard III: Student Learning

**Parents play an integral role in assisting student learning.**

## Checklist for Quality Indicators

| | Consistently Evident | Frequently Evident | Seldom Evident | Not Evident |
|---|---|---|---|---|
| 1. Seek and encourage parent participation in decision-making that affects students. | | | | |
| 2. Inform parents of the expectations for students in each subject at each grade level. | | | | |
| 3. Provide information regarding how parents can foster learning at home, give appropriate assistance, monitor homework, and give feedback to teachers. | | | | |
| 4. Regularly assign interactive homework that will require students to discuss and interact with their parents about what they are learning in class. | | | | |
| 5. Sponsor workshops or distribute information to assist parents in understanding how students can improve skills, get help when needed, meet class expectations, and perform well on assessments. | | | | |
| 6. Involve parents in setting student goals each year and in planning for post-secondary education and careers. Encourage the development of a personalized education plan for each student, where parents are full partners. | | | | |
| 7. Provide opportunities for staff members to learn and share successful approaches to engaging parents in their child's education. | | | | |

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# Standard IV: Volunteering

**Parents are welcome in the school, and their support and assistance are sought.**

## Checklist for Quality Indicators

| | Consistently Evident | Frequently Evident | Seldom Evident | Not Evident |
|---|---|---|---|---|
| 1. Ensure that office staff greetings, signage near the entrances and any other interaction with parents create a climate in which parents feel valued and welcome. | | | | |
| 2. Survey parents regarding their interests, talents and availability, then coordinate the parent resources with those that exist within the school and among the faculty. | | | | |
| 3. Ensure that parents who are unable to volunteer in the school building are given the options for helping in other ways, at home or place of employment. | | | | |
| 4. Organize an easily accessible program for utilizing parent volunteers, providing ample training on volunteer procedures and school protocol. | | | | |
| 5. Develop a system for contacting all parents to assist as the year progresses. | | | | |
| 6. Design opportunities for those with limited time and resources to participate by addressing child care, transportation, work schedule needs, and so forth. | | | | |
| 7. Show appreciation for parents' participation and value their diverse contributions. | | | | |
| 8. Educate and assist staff members in creating an inviting climate and effectively utilizing volunteer resources. | | | | |
| 9. Ensure that volunteer activities are meaningful and built on volunteer interests and abilities. | | | | |

# Standard V: School Decision Making and Advocacy

**Parents are full partners in the decisions that affect children and families.**

## Checklist for Quality Indicators

| | Consistently Evident | Frequently Evident | Seldom Evident | Not Evident |
|---|---|---|---|---|
| 1. Provide understandable, accessible, and well-publicized processes for influencing decisions, raising issues or concerns, appealing decisions, and resolving problems. | | | | |
| 2. Encourage the formation of PTAs or other parent groups to identify and respond to issues of interest to parents. | | | | |
| 3. Include parents on all decision-making and advisory committees and ensure adequate training for such areas as policy, curriculum, budget, school reform initiatives, safety, and personnel. Where a site governance body exists, give equal representation to parents. | | | | |

### Standard V: continued

| | Consistently Evident | Frequently Evident | Seldom Evident | Not Evident |
|---|---|---|---|---|
| 4. Provide parents with current information regarding school policies, practices, and both student and school performance data. | | | | |
| 5. Enable parents to participate as partners when setting school goals, developing or evaluating programs and policies or responding to performance data. | | | | |
| 6. Encourage and facilitate active parent participation in the decisions that affect students, such as student placement, course selection and individual personalized education plans. | | | | |
| 7. Treat parent concerns with respect and demonstrate genuine interest in developing solutions. | | | | |
| 8. Promote parent participation on school district, state, and national committees and issues. | | | | |
| 9. Provide training for staff and parents on collaborative partnering and shared decision making. | | | | |

# Standard VI: Collaborating with Community

**Community resources are used to strengthen schools, families, and student learning.**

### Checklist for Quality Indicators

| | Consistently Evident | Frequently Evident | Seldom Evident | Not Evident |
|---|---|---|---|---|
| 1. Distribute information regarding cultural, recreational, academic, health, social, and other resources that serve families within the community. | | | | |
| 2. Develop partnerships with local business and service groups to advance student learning and assist schools and families. | | | | |
| 3. Encourage employers to adopt policies and practices that promote and support adult participation in children's education. | | | | |
| 4. Foster student participation in community service. | | | | |
| 5. Involve community members in school volunteer programs. | | | | |
| 6. Disseminate information to the school community, including those without school-age children, regarding school programs and performance. | | | | |
| 7. Collaborate with community agencies to provide family support services and adult learning opportunities, enabling parents to more fully participate in activities that support education. | | | | |
| 8. Inform staff members of the resources available in the community and strategies for utilizing those resources. | | | | |

# Appendix B

## Action Plan Worksheet

Area of Focus: _____

Goal: _____

Activity: _____

What Will Be Done? _____

Purpose of the Activity: _____

Who Will Do This? _____

When? _____

Materials/Resources Needed: _____

Evidence of Success: _____

# Appendix C

# Developing a Parent/Family Involvement Policy

## The process of developing policies should include:

- administrators
- businesses
- community-based organizations
- parents
- students
- teachers
- other key stakeholders

## The policies should contain the following:

- Opportunities for all parents to become involved in decision-making about how the parent/family involvement programs will be designed, implemented, assessed, and strengthened.
- Outreach to encourage participation of parents who might have low-level literacy skills and/or for whom English is not their primary language.
- Regular information for parents about the objectives of educational programs and their child's participation and progress in those programs.
- Professional development for teachers and staff to enhance their effectiveness with parents.
- Linkages with special service agencies and community groups to address key family and community issues.
- Involvement of parents of children at all ages and grade levels.
- Opportunities for parents to share in decision making regarding school policies and procedures affecting their children.
- Recognition of diverse family structures, circumstances and responsibilities, including differences that might impede parent participation. The person(s) responsible for a child may not be the child's biological parent(s) and policies and programs should include participation by all persons interested in the child's educational progress.

*From*: Developing Family/School Partnerships: Guidelines for Schools and School Districts, *National Coalition for Parent Involvement in Education*

# Appendix D

# Model Parent/Family Involvement Policy

The Board of Education recognizes that a child's education is a responsibility shared by the school and family during the entire period the child spends in school. To support the goal of the school district to educate all students effectively, the schools and parents must work as knowledgeable partners.

Although parents are diverse in culture, language, and needs, they share the school's commitment to the educational success of their children. This school district and the schools within its boundaries, in collaboration with parents, shall establish programs and practices that enhance parent involvement and reflect the specific needs of students and their families.

To this end, the Board supports the development, implementation, and regular evaluation of a parent involvement program in each school, which will involve parents at all grade levels in a variety of roles. The parent involvement programs will be comprehensive and coordinated in nature. They will include, but not be limited to, the following components of successful parent involvement programs:

- Communication between home and school is regular, two-way, and meaningful.
- Responsible parenting is promoted and supported.
- Parents play an integral role in assisting student learning.
- Parents are welcome in the school, and their support and assistance are sought.
- Parents are full partners in the decisions that affect children and families.
- Community resources are made available to strengthen school programs, family practices, and student learning.

The Board of Education supports professional development opportunities for staff members to enhance understanding of effective parent involvement strategies. The Board also recognizes the importance of administrative leadership in setting expectations and creating a climate conducive to parental participation.

In addition to programs at the school level, the Board of Education supports the development, implementation, and regular evaluation of a program to involve parents in the decisions and practices of the school district, using to the degree possible, the components listed above.

Engaging parents is essential to improved student achievement. This school district shall foster and support active parent involvement.

This sample policy is based, in part, on the Parent Involvement Policy adopted by the California State Board of Education.

# Appendix E

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# Appendix F

# Acknowledgments

More than 30 national education and parent involvement groups have endorsed the National Standards for Parent/Family Involvement Programs. The National PTA thanks the following organizations and institutions for agreeing to uphold these standards.

**The ASPIRA Association, Inc.**
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**Council for Exceptional Children**
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**Council of the Great City Schools**
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**Family Impact Seminar**
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**Hand-in-Hand—Parents, Schools, Communities United for Kids**
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**Howard University Graduate Programs in Urban School Psychology**
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